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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by National Alliance of Women's Organizations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

NAWO, the National Alliance of Women's Organizations, is an umbrella providing representation and support for women's organisations whose headquarters are in England, and for individual supporters. NAWO seeks an end to gender inequality, and the establishment of social justice based on internationally agreed human rights instruments, for all women. NAWO works with sister organisations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the UK Joint Committee on Women, which is the United Kingdom national co-ordination for the European Women's Lobby, where it represents the concerns and needs of all UK women.

This year, 10 years since Beijing, we celebrate the achievements of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) – established in June 1946 – and the work of activists, NGOs, governments and international agencies, which have since that time worked tirelessly to create a world where equality based on access to human rights between women and men is a reality and not just a dream.

Now, after over half a century since 1946, which has included four international women's conferences focusing on equality, development and peace that have yielded many strenuously negotiated internationally agreed documents and given rise to a heightened world consciousness, we are much further along that path towards equality. But a dream it still remains.

The world over, even in an age of high technological advancement and with many working for progress and change, grave inequalities remain: discrimination against women and the girl child is still practiced in each of the Beijing Platform for Action's twelve critical areas and in new spheres not highlighted in 1995. And discrimination on additional grounds such as class, creed, ability and age further complicates efforts to build a just and peaceful world.

The Beijing Platform for Action, itself, the Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Security Council resolution 1325 are but a few of the international instruments underpinning the work undertaken by activists, governments, NGOs and UN agencies. They are excellent tools for the advancement of women and girls and demonstrate the important recognition that the above-mentioned challenges are real, must be faced and overcome. Further, recognition of the essential part played and to be played by civil society is another vital step forward.

At CSW, NGOs and governments alike come closest, we believe, to a shared vision of a world where equality, justice and peace are possible. CSW is an international force working towards that noble end. But there has been an unacknowledged movement on the part of some to ghettoise this Commission, corral all discussions regarding women into the sphere only of CSW and in addition, to stymie its efforts. There is no logic in restricting discussion on the needs and concerns of half the world's population on any matter to one UN forum: to do so excludes half the world's population at each meeting and in every programme. This does not mean there is no further need for specific attention, specific agencies and programmes to meet women's needs – it remains vital that the UN champions the advancement of women and girls – but what is also required is the proper recognition of the value of women as effective leaders and decision-makers, peace creators, community and family builders and shapers of development - globally. The issue of gender should be included in every national and international process.

Gender equality needs to be integral to every discussion and plan: there should be a gender audit for each process, international agreement and institutional mechanism.

In other words, gender mainstreaming properly understood to include specific women-centred activities, and long accepted as UN policy, must become a priority and be implemented throughout the UN system and by governments everywhere.

The principle of gender mainstreaming arose through the world conferences on women and there is general agreement in the literature that global, international conferences are of immense value within UN processes, but thus far there has been a lack of enthusiasm among states parties and some NGOs to engage in a further international conference on women. This is due largely to a realistic fear that some parties will use it as an opportunity to go back on already established agreements. Such opportunism is deplorable and the goal disgraceful.

Great though their achievements have been, the work of the four world conferences on women has only just started. Through these world conferences it has been possible to reach women in all walks of life in every corner of the globe and to awaken in them an awareness of the rightness of empowerment and equality and their entitlements. The Beijing Platform for Action is, for grass-roots women, the cornerstone whereby they may truly know that no person should be discriminated against on the grounds of their gender alone. The mechanisms that exist to forge this reality are not being adequately utilised but they also need to be further developed and strengthened.

NAWO and our partners and associates around the world therefore seek a conference which, rather than focussing on the one range of conferences on women and just on the Beijing Platform for Action, should assess all UN processes with respect to the achievement of gender equality goals.

There is no time to lose and no room left for vacillation. Multitudes still suffer poverty - and the majority of them are women and children. If we are to realise that dream of a better world, the advancement of women is an absolute and fundamental necessity.

We call on all states parties, NGOs, UN agencies and other stakeholders to use this important Commission on the Status of Women to insist that gender equality becomes the "bottom line", the criteria by which any process is judged valuable or successful. We call on this CSW, in the year of the first assessment of the Millennium Development Goals, when looking at gaps, implementation and emerging issues of the Beijing Platform for Action, to develop and apply sustainable and robust mechanisms to improve gender equality in all UN international agreements and processes, and call on states parties to do the same nationally.

The world over, women and men of vision are calling for women and men together to become champions of equality in action. Only when this occurs will there be true advancement for women and only then will we have created, built and shaped the world into the dream we share.